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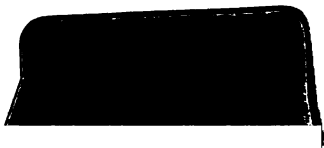
The image shows the front cover of a book. The cover is a deep blue color with a subtle, embossed floral pattern. A gold-colored rectangular label is positioned at the top, containing the title 'AN UNEXPECTED RESULT' in a black, stylized font. The label is decorated with small gold floral motifs at its corners. Below the label, the central part of the cover features a large, intricate embossed design of a plant with several star-shaped flowers and long, slender leaves. At the bottom of the cover, a gold-colored banner contains the text 'THE RUBY SERIES' in a simple, sans-serif font. The entire cover is framed by a decorative border with repeating floral and geometric patterns.

AN UNEXPECTED
RESULT

THE RUBY SERIES



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AN
UNEXPECTED RESULT

BY

EDWARD P. ROE

AUTHOR OF "BARRIERS BURNED AWAY," "OPENING A CHESTNUT BURN,"
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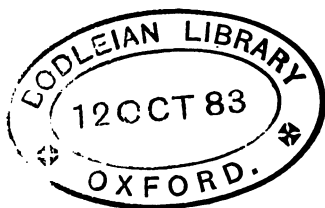
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I.

AN UNEXPECTED RESULT.

"JACK, she played with me deliberately, heartlessly. I can never forgive her."

"In that case, Will, I congratulate you. Such a girl isn't worth a second thought, and you've made a happy escape."

"No congratulations, if you please. You can talk coolly, because in regard to such matters you are cool, and, I may add, a trifle cold. Ambition is your mistress, and a musty law book has more attractions for you than any woman living. I'm not so tempered. I am subject to the general law of Nature, and a woman's love and sympathy are essential to success in my life and work."

"That's all right, but there are as good fish—"

"Oh, have done with your trite nonsense," interrupted Will Munson impatiently. "I'd consult you on a point of law in preference to most of the graybeards, but I was a fool to speak of this affair. And yet as my most intimate friend—"

"Come, Will, I'm not unfeeling," and John Ackland rose and put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "I admit that the subject is remote from my line of thought and wholly beyond my experience. If the affair is so serious I shall take it to heart."

"Serious! Is it a slight thing to be crippled for life?"

"Oh, come now," said Ackland, giving his friend a hearty and encouraging thump, "you are sound in mind and limb; what matters a scratch on the heart to a man not twenty-five?"

"Very well; I'll say no more about it. When I need a lawyer I'll come to you. Good-bye; I sail for Brazil in the morning."

"Will, sit down and look me in the eyes," said Ackland decisively. "Will, forgive me. *You are* in trouble. A man's eyes usually tell

me more than all his words, and I don't like the expression of yours. There is yellow fever in Brazil."

"I know it," was the careless reply.

"What excuse have you for going?"

"Business complications have arisen there, and I promptly volunteered to go. My employers were kind enough to hesitate and warn me, and to say that they could send a man less valuable to them, but I soon overcame their objections."

"That is your excuse for going. The reason I see in your eyes. You are reckless, Will."

"I have reason to be."

"I can't agree with you, but I feel for you all the same. Tell me all about it, for this is sad news to me. I hoped to have joined you on the beach in a few days, and to have spent August with you and my cousin. I confess I am beginning to feel exceedingly vindictive toward this pretty little monster, and if any harm comes to you I shall be savage enough to scalp her."

"The harm has come already, Jack. I'm hit hard. She showed me a mirage of happi-

ness that has made my present world a desert. I *am* reckless — I'm desperate. You may think it is weak and unmanly, but you don't know anything about it. Time or the fever may cure me, but now I am bankrupt in all that gives value to life. A woman with an art so consummate that it seemed artless, deliberately evoked the best there was in me, then threw it away as indifferently as a cast-off glove."

"Tell me how it came about."

"How can I tell you? How can I in cold-blood recall glances, words, intonations, the pressure of a hand that seemed alive with reciprocal feeling? In addition to her beauty she had the irresistible charm of fascination. I was wary at first, but she angled for me with a skill that would have disarmed any man who did not believe in the inherent falseness of woman. The children in the house idolized her, and I have great faith in a child's intuitions."

"Oh, that was only a part of her guile," said Ackland frowningly.

"Probably; at any rate she has taken all

the colour and zest out of my life. I wish some one could pay her back in her own coin. I don't suppose she has a heart, but I wish her vanity might be wounded in a way that would teach her a lesson never to be forgotten."

"It certainly would be a well-deserved retribution," said Ackland musingly.

"Jack, you are the one, of all the world, to administer the punishment. I don't believe a woman's smiles ever quickened your pulse one beat."

"You are right, Will, it is my cold-bloodedness—to put your thought in plain English—that will prove your best ally."

"I only hope that I am not leading you into danger. You will need an Indian's stoicism."

"Bah! I may fail ignominiously, and find her vanity invulnerable, but I pledge you my word that I will avenge you if it be within the compass of my skill. My cousin, Mrs. Alston, may prove a useful ally. I think you wrote me that the name of this siren was Eva Van Tyne?"

"Yes; I only wish she had the rudiments

of a heart, so that she might feel, in a faint, far-off way, a little of the pain she has inflicted on me. Don't let her make you falter or grow remorseful, Jack. Remember that you have given a pledge to one who may be dead before you can fulfil it."

Ackland said farewell to his friend with the fear that he might never see him again, and a few days later found himself at a New England seaside resort, with a relentless purpose lurking in his dark eyes. Mrs. Alston did unconsciously prove a useful ally, for her wealth and elegance gave her unusual prestige in the house, and in joining her party Ackland achieved immediately all the social recognition he desired.

While strolling with this lady on the piazza he observed the object of his quest, and was at once compelled to make more allowance than he had done hitherto for his friend's discomfiture. Two or three children were leaning over the young girl's chair, and she was amusing them by some clever caricatures. She was not so interested, however, but that she soon noted the new comer, and bestowed upon him from

time to time curious and furtive glances. That these were not returned seemed to occasion her some surprise, for she was not accustomed to be so utterly ignored, even by a stranger. A little later Ackland saw her consulting the hotel register.

"I have at least awakened her curiosity," he thought.

"I've been waiting for you to ask me who that pretty girl was," said Mrs. Alston, laughing; "you do indeed exceed all men in indifference toward our sex."

"I know all about that girl," was the grim reply. "She has played the very deuce with my friend Munson."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Alston, indignantly, "it was the most shameful piece of coquetry I ever saw. She is a puzzle to me. To the children and the old people in the house she is consideration and kindness itself, but she appears to regard men of your years as legitimate game and is perfectly remorseless. So beware. She is dangerous, invulnerable as you imagine yourself to be. She will practise her wiles upon you if you give her half a chance, and her art has much

more than her pretty face to enforce it. She is unusually clever."

Ackland's slight shrug was so contemptuous that his cousin was nettled, and she thought, "I wish the girl could disturb his complacent equanimity just a little; it vexes one to see a man so indifferent; it's a slight to our sex," and she determined to give Miss Van Tyne the vantage-ground of an introduction at the first opportunity.

And this occurred before the evening was over. To her surprise Ackland entered into an extended conversation with the enemy. "Well," she thought, "if he begins in this style there will soon be another victim. Miss Van Tyne can talk to as bright a man as he is and hold her own. Meanwhile she will assail him in a hundred covert ways. Out of regard for his friend he should have shown some disapproval of her, but there he sits quietly talking in the publicity of the parlour."

"Mrs. Alston," said a friend at her elbow, "you ought to forewarn your cousin and tell him of Mr. Munson's fate."

"He knows all about Mr. Munson," was her

reply. "Indeed, the latter is his most intimate friend. I suppose my cousin is indulging in a little natural curiosity concerning this destroyer of masculine peace, and if ever a man could do so in safety he can."

"Why so?"

"Well, I never knew so unsusceptible a man. With the exception of a few of his relatives, he has never cared for ladies' society."

Mrs. Alston was far astray in supposing that curiosity was Ackland's motive in 'his rather prolonged conversation with Miss Van Tyne. It was simply a part of his tactics, for he proposed to waste no time in skirmishing or in guarded and gradual approaches. He would cross weapons at once, and secure his object by a sharp and aggressive campaign. His object was to obtain immediately some idea of the calibre of the girl's mind, and in this respect he was agreeably surprised, for while giving little evidence of thorough education, she was unusually intelligent and exceedingly quick in her perceptions. He soon learned also that she was gifted with more than woman's customary intuition, that she was watching his

face closely for meanings that he might not choose to express in words or else to conceal by his language. While he feared that his task would be far more difficult than he expected, and that he would have to be extremely guarded in order not to reveal his design, he was glad to learn that the foe was worthy of his steel. Meanwhile her ability and self-reliance banished all compunction. He had no scruples in humbling the pride of a woman who was at once so proud, so heartless, and so clever. Nor would the effort be wearisome, for she had proved herself both amusing and interesting. He might enjoy it quite as much as an intricate law case.

Even prejudiced Ackland, as he saw her occasionally on the following day, was compelled to admit that she was more than pretty. Her features ~~were~~ neither regular nor faultless. Her mouth was too large to be perfect and her nose was not Grecian, but her eyes were peculiarly fine and illumined her face, whose chief charm lay in its power of expression. If she chose, almost all her thoughts and feelings could find their reflex there. The trouble was

at she could as readily mask her thought and press what she did not feel. Her eyes were the darkest blue and her hair seemed light in contrast. It was evident that she had studied grace so thoroughly that her manner and carriage appeared unstudied and natural. She never seemed self-conscious, and yet no one had ever seen her in an ungainly posture or had known her to make an awkward gesture. This grace, however, like a finished style in writing, was tinged so strongly with her own individuality that it appeared original as compared with the fashionable monotony which characterized the manners of so many of her age. She could not have been much more than twenty, and yet, as Mrs. Alston took pains to inform her cousin, she had long been in society, adding, "Its homage is her breath of life, and from all I hear your friend Munson's had many predecessors. Be on your guard."

"Your solicitude in my behalf is quite touching," he replied. "Who is this fair rascal that has made so many wrecks and acts so heavy a revenue from society? Who

has the care of her, and what are her antecedents ? ”

“She is an orphan and possessed, I am told, of considerable property in her own name. A forceless, nerveless maiden aunt is about the only antecedent we see much of. Her guardian has been here once or twice, but practically she is independent.”

Miss Van Tyne's efforts to learn something concerning Ackland were apparently quite as casual and indifferent and yet were made with utmost skill. She knew that Mrs. Alston's friend was something of a gossip, and she led her to speak of the subject of her thoughts with an indirect *finesse* that would have amused the young man exceedingly could he have been an unobserved witness. When she learned that he was Mr. Munson's intimate friend and that he was aware of her treatment of the latter, she was somewhat disconcerted. One so forewarned might not become an easy prey. But the additional fact that he was almost a woman-hater put her upon her mettle at once, and she felt that here was a chance for a conquest such as she had never made before. She

now believed that she had discovered the key to his indifference. He was ready enough to amuse himself with her as a clever woman, but knew her too well to bestow upon her even a friendly thought.

"If I can bring him to my feet it will be a triumph indeed," she murmured exultantly, "and at my feet he shall be if he gives me half a chance." Seemingly he gave her every chance that she could desire, and while he scarcely made any effort to seek her society, she noted with secret satisfaction that he often appeared as if accidentally near her, and that he ever made it the easiest and most natural thing in the world for her to join him. His conversation was often as gay and unconventional as she could wish, but she seldom failed to detect in it an uncomfortable element of satire and irony. He always left her dissatisfied with herself and with a depressing consciousness that she had made no impression upon him.

His conquest grew into an absorbing desire, and she unobtrusively brought to bear upon him every art and fascination that she pos-

sessed. Her toilets were as exquisite as they were simple. The children were made to idolize her more than ever, but Ackland was candid enough to admit that this was not all guile on her part, for she was evidently in sympathy with the little people, who can rarely be imposed upon by any amount of false interest. Indeed, he saw no reason to doubt that she abounded in good-nature toward all except the natural objects of her ruling passion; but the very skill and deliberateness with which she sought to gratify this passion greatly increased his vindictive feeling. He saw how naturally and completely his friend had been deceived, and how exquisite must have been the hopes and anticipations so falsely raised. Therefore he smiled more grimly at the close of each succeeding day, and was fully bent upon the accomplishment of his purpose.

At length Miss Van Tyne changed her tactics and grew quite oblivious to Ackland's presence in the house, but she found him apparently too indifferent to observe the fact. She then permitted one of her several admirers to become devoted; Ackland did not offer the

protest of even a glance. He stood, as it were, just where she had left him, ready for an occasional chat, stroll or excursion, if the affair came about naturally and without much effort on his part. She found that she could not induce him to seek her or annoy him by an indifference which she meant should be more marked than his own.

Some little time after there came a windy day, and the surf was so heavy that there were but few bathers. Ackland was a good swimmer, and took his plunge as usual. He was leaving the water when Miss Van Tyne ran down the beach and was about to dart through the breakers in her wonted fearless style.

"Be careful," he said to her; "the undertow is strong, and the man who has charge of the bathing is ill and not here. The tide is changing—in fact, running out already, I believe." But she would not even look at him, much less answer. As there were other gentlemen present he started for his bath-house, but had proceeded but a little way up the beach before a cry brought him to the water's edge instantly.

"Something is wrong with Miss Van Tyne," cried half a dozen voices. "She ventured out recklessly, and it seems as if she couldn't get back."

At that moment her form rose on the crest of a wave, and above the thunder of the surf came her faint cry, "Help!"

The other bathers stood irresolute, for she was dangerously far out, and the tide had evidently turned. Ackland, on the contrary, dashed through the breakers, and then, in his efforts for speed, drove through the waves nearest to the shore. When he reached the place where he expected to find her he saw nothing for a moment or two but great crested billows that every moment were increasing in height under the rising wind. For a moment he feared that she had perished, and the thought that the beautiful creature had met her death so suddenly and awfully made him almost sick and faint. An instant later, however, a wave threw her up from the trough of the sea into full vision somewhat on his right, and a few strong strokes brought him to her side.

"Oh, save me!" she gasped.

"Don't cling to me," he said sternly. "Do as I bid you. Strike out for the shore if you are able; if not, lie on your back and float."

She did the latter, for now that aid had reached her she apparently recovered from her panic and was perfectly tractable. He placed his left hand under her and struck out quietly, aware that the least excitement causing exhaustion on his part might cost both of them their lives.

As they approached the shore a rope was thrown to them, and Ackland, who felt his strength giving way, seized it desperately. He passed his arm around his companion with a grasp that almost made her breathless, and they were dragged, half suffocated, through the water until strong hands on either side rushed them through the breakers.

Miss Van Tyne for a moment or two stood dazed and panting, then disengaged herself from the rather warm support of the devoted admirer whom she had tried to play against Ackland, and tried to walk, but after a few uncertain steps fell senseless on the sand, thus for

the moment drawing to herself the attention of the increasing throng. Ackland, glad to escape notice, was staggering off to his bath-house when several ladies, more mindful of his part in the affair than the men had been, overtook him with a fire of questions and plaudits.

"Please leave me alone," he said, almost savagely, without looking around.

"What a bear he is!" they chorused. "Any one else would have been a little complacent over such an exploit." And they followed the unconscious girl, who was now being carried to the hotel.

Ackland locked the door of his little apartment and sank panting on the bench. "Maledictions on her!" he muttered. "At one time there was a better chance of her being fatal to me than to Munson with his yellow-fever tragedy in prospect. Her recklessness to-day was perfectly insane. If she tries it again she may drown for all that I care, or at least ought to care."

His anger appeared to act like a tonic, and he was soon ready to return to the house. A

dozen sprang forward to congratulate him, but they found such impatience and annoyance at all reference to the affair that with many surmises the topic was dropped.

"You are a queer fellow," remarked his privileged cousin, as he took her out to dinner. "Why don't you let people speak naturally about the matter, or rather why don't you pose as the hero of the occasion?"

"Because the whole affair was most unnatural, and I am deeply incensed. In a case of necessity I am ready to risk my life, although it has unusual attractions for me, but I'm no melodramatic hero looking for adventures. What necessity was there in this case? It is the old story of Munson over again in another guise. The act was that of an inconsiderate heartless woman who follows her impulses and inclinations no matter what may be the consequences." After a moment he added less indignantly, "I must give her credit for one thing, angry as I am—she behaved well in the water, otherwise she would have drowned me."

"She is not a fool. Most women would have drowned you."

"She is indeed not a fool; therefore she's the more to blame. If she is ever so reckless again may I be asleep in my room. Of course one can't stand by and see a woman drown, no matter who or what she is."

"Jack, what made her so reckless?" Mrs. Alston asked, with a sudden intelligence lighting up her face.

"Hang it all! How should I know? What made her torture Munson? She follows her impulses, and they are not always conducive to any one's well-being, not even her own."

"Mark my words, she has never shown this kind of recklessness before."

"Oh yes, she has. She was running her horse to death the other hot morning, and nearly trampled on a child;" and he told of an unexpected encounter while he was taking a rather extended ramble."

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Alston, smiling significantly, "I think I understand her symptoms better than you do. If you are as cold-blooded as you seem I may have to interfere."

"O bah!" he answered impatiently. "Pardon me, but I should despise myself for ever

should I become sentimental, knowing what I do."

"Jack, had you no compunctions when fearing that such a beautiful girl might perish? We are going to have an awful night. Hear the wind whistle and moan, and the sky is already black with clouds. The roar of the surf grows louder every hour. Think of that lovely form being out in those black angry waves, darted at and preyed upon by horrible slimy monsters. Oh, it fairly makes my flesh creep!"

"And mine, too," he said, with a strong gesture of disgust; "especially when I remember that I should have kept her company, for of course I could not return without her. I confess that when at first I could not find her I was fairly sick at the thought of her fate. But remember how uncalled for it all was—quite as much so as that poor Will Munson is on his way to die with the yellow fever, like enough."

"Jack," said his cousin, affectionately, laying her hand on his arm, "blessings on your courage to-day. If what might have happened so easily had occurred, I could never have

looked upon the sea again without a shudder. I should have been tormented by a horrible memory all my life. It was brave and noble—”

“Oh, hush!” he said angrily. “I won’t hear another word about it, even from you. I’m not brave and noble. I went because I was compelled to go; I hated to go; I hate the girl, and have more reason now than ever. If we had both drowned, no doubt there would have been less trouble in the world. There would have been one lawyer the less, and a coquette extinguished. Now we shall both prey on society in our different ways indefinitely.”

“Jack, you are in an awful mood to-day.”

“I am—never was in a worse.”

“Having so narrowly escaped death you ought to be subdued and grateful.”

“On the contrary, I’m inclined to profanity. Excuse me—don’t wish any dessert. I’ll try a walk and a cigar. You will now be glad to be rid of me on any terms.”

“Yes, Jack. [See, Miss Van Tyne has so

far recovered as to come down. She looked unutterable things towards you as she entered."

"Of course she did. Very few of her thoughts concerning me or other young men would sound well if uttered. Tell your friends to let this topic alone, or I shall be rude to them," and without a glance toward the girl he had rescued he left the dining-room.

"Well, well," murmured Mrs. Alston, "I never saw Jack in such a mood before. It is quite as unaccountable as Miss Van Tyne's recklessness. I wonder what is the matter with *him*."

Ackland was speedily driven back from his walk by the rain, which fact he did not regret, for he found himself exhausted and depressed. Seeking a retired piazza in order to be alone, he sat down with his hat drawn over his eyes and smoked furiously. Before very long, however, he was startled out of a painful reverie by a timid voice saying;

"Mr. Ackland, won't you permit me to thank you?"

He rose, and Miss Van Tyne stood before him

with outstretched hand. He did not notice it, but bowing coldly, said :

"Please consider that you have thanked me, and let the subject drop."

"Do not be so harsh with me," she pleaded. "I cannot help it if you are. Mr. Ackland, you saved my life."

"Possibly."

"And possibly you think that it is scarcely worth saving."

"Possibly your own conscience suggested that thought to you."

"You are heartless," she burst out indignantly.

He began to laugh. "That's a droll charge for you to make," he said.

She looked at him steadfastly for a moment, and then murmured : "You are thinking of your friend Mr. Munson."

"That would be quite natural. How many more can you think of?"

"You are indeed unrelenting," she faltered tears coming into her eyes; "but I cannot forget that but for you I should now be out there"—and she indicated the sea by a ges-

ture, then covered her face with her hands and shuddered.

"Do not feel under obligations. I should have been compelled to do as much for any human being. You seem to forget that I stood an even chance of being out there with you, and that there was no more need of the risk than there was that my best friend's life should be blight—"

"You—you out there?" she cried, springing toward him and pointing to the sea.

"Certainly. You cannot suppose that, having once found you, I could come ashore without you. As it was, my strength was rapidly giving way, and were it not for the rope—"

"Oh, forgive me," she cried, passionately seizing his hand in spite of him. "It never entered my mind that you could drown. I somehow felt that nothing could harm you. I was reckless—I didn't know what I was doing—I don't understand myself any more. Please—please forgive me, or I shall not sleep to-night."

"Certainly," he said lightly, "if you will not refer to our little episode again."

"Please don't speak in that way," she sighed, turning away.

"I have complied with your request."

"I suppose I must be content," she resumed sadly. Then turning her head slowly toward him she added, hesitatingly, "Will you forgive me for—for treating your friend—"

"No," he replied, with such stern emphasis that she shrank from him and trembled.

"You are indeed heartless," she faltered, as she turned to leave him.

"Miss Van Tyne," he said indignantly, "twice you have charged me with being heartless. Your voice and manner indicate that I would be unnatural and unworthy of respect were I what you charge. In the name of all that's rational, what does this word 'heartless' mean to you? Where was your heart when you sent my friend away so wretched and humbled that he is virtually seeking the death from which you are so glad to escape?"

"I did not love him," she protested faintly.

He laughed bitterly, and continued: "Love! That's a word which I believe has no meaning for you at all, but it had for him. You are a

remarkably clever woman, Miss Van Tyne. You have brains in abundance. See, I do you justice. What is more, you are so beautiful and can be so fascinating that a man who believed in you might easily worship you. You made him believe in you. You tried to beguile me into a condition that with my nature would be ruin indeed. You never had the baby plea of a silly, shallow woman. I took pains to find that out the first evening we met. In your art of beguiling an honest, trusting man you were as perfect as you were remorseless, and you understood exactly what you were doing."

For a time she seemed overwhelmed by his lava-like torrent of words, and stood with bowed head and a shrinking, trembling form, but when he ceased she turned to him and said, bitterly and emphatically:

"I did *not* understand what I was doing, nor would my brain have taught me were I all intellect like yourself. I half wish you had left me to drown," and with a slight despairing gesture she turned away and did not look back.

Ackland's face lighted up with a sudden flash of intelligence and deep feeling. He started to recall her, hesitated and watched her earnestly until she disappeared ; then looking out on the scowling ocean, he took off his hat and exclaimed in a deep, low tone :

"By all that's divine, can this be ? Is it possible that through the suffering of her own awakening heart she is learning to know the pain she has given to others ? Should this be true, the affair is taking an entirely new aspect, and Munson will be avenged as neither of us ever dreamed would be possible."

He resumed his old position and thought long and deeply, then rejoined his cousin, who was somewhat surprised to find that his bitter mood had given place to his former composure.

"How is this, Jack ?" she asked. "As the storm grows wilder without, you become more serene."

"Only trying to make amends for my former bearishness," he said carelessly, but with a little rising colour.

"I don't understand you at all," she con-

tinued, discontentedly. "I saw you sulking in that out-of-the-way corner, and I saw Miss Van Tyne approach you hesitatingly and timidly with the purpose no doubt of thanking you. Of course I did not stay to watch, but a little later I met Miss Van Tyne, and she looked white and rigid. She has not left her room since.

"You take a great interest in Miss Van Tyne. It is well you are not in my place."

"I half wish I was and had your chances. You are more pitiless than the waves from which you saved her."

"I can't help being just what I am," he said coldly. "Good-night." And he too disappeared for the rest of the evening.

The rain continued to fall in blinding torrents, and the building fairly trembled under the violence of the wind. The guests drew together in the lighted rooms, and sought by varied amusements to pass the time until the fierceness of the storm abated, few caring to retire while the uproar of the elements was so great.

At last as the storm passed away, and the late

rising moon threw a sickly gleam on the tumultuous waters, Eva looked from her window with sleepless eyes, thinking sadly and bitterly of the past and future. Suddenly a dark figure appeared on the beach in the track of the moonlight. She snatched an opera-glass, but could not recognise the solitary form. The thought would come, however, that it was Ackland, and if it were, what were his thoughts and what place had she in them? Why was he watching so near the spot that might have been their burial-place?

"At least he shall not think that I can stolidly sleep after what has occurred," she thought, and she turned up her light, opened her window and sat down by it again. Whoever the unseasonable Rambler might be he appeared to recognize the gleam from her window, for he walked hastily down the beach and disappeared. After a time she darkened her room again and waited in vain for his return. "If it were he, he shuns even the slightest recognition," she thought despairingly, and the early dawn was not far distant when she fell into an unquiet sleep.

For the next few days Miss Van Tyne was a puzzle to all except Mrs. Alston. She was quite unlike the girl she had formerly been, and she made no effort to disguise the fact. In the place of her old exuberance of life and spirits, there were lassitude and great depression. The rich colour ebbed steadily from her face, and dark lines under her eyes betokened sleepless nights. She saw the many curious glances directed toward her, but apparently did not care what was thought or surmised. Were it not that her manner toward Ackland was so misleading the tendency to couple their names together would have been far more general. She neither sought nor shunned his society, and in fact treated him as she did the other gentlemen of her acquaintance. She took him at his word. He had said he would forgive her on condition that she would not speak of what he was pleased to term that "little episode," and she never referred to it.

Her aunt was as much at fault as the others, and one day querulously complained to Mrs. Alston that she was growing anxious about Eva. "At first I thought she was disappointed

over the indifference of that icy cousin of yours, but she does not appear to care a straw for him. When I mention his name she speaks of him in a natural, grateful way, then her thoughts appear to wander off to some matter that is troubling her. I can't find out whether she is ill or whether she has heard some bad news of which she will not speak. She never gave me or any one that I know of much of her confidence."

Mrs. Alston listened but made no comments. She was sure she was right in regard to Miss Van Tyne's trouble, but her cousin mystified her. Ackland had become perfectly inscrutable. As far as she could judge by any word or act of his he had simply lost his interest in Miss Van Tyne, and that was all that could be said, and yet a fine instinct tormented Mrs. Alston with the doubt that this was not true and that the young girl was the subject of a sedulously concealed scrutiny. Was he watching for his friend or for his own sake, or was he, in a spirit of retaliation, enjoying the suffering of one who had made others suffer? His reserve was so great that she could not pierce



it, and his caution baffled even her vigilance. But she waited patiently, assured that the little drama must soon pass into a more significant phase.

And she was right. Miss Van Tyne could not maintain the line of action she had resolved upon. She had thought, "I won't try to appear happy when I am not. I won't adopt the conventional mask of gaiety when the heart is wounded. How often have I seen through it and smiled at the transparent farce—farce it seemed then, but I now fear it was often tragedy. At any rate there was neither dignity nor deception in it. I have done with being false, and so shall simply act myself and be a lady. Though my heart break a thousand times, not even by a glance shall I show that it is breaking for him. If he or others surmise the truth they may. Let them. It is a part of my penance, and I will show the higher, stronger pride of one who makes no vain, useless pretence to happy indifference, but who can maintain a self-control so perfect that even Mrs. Alston shall not see one unmaidenly advance or overture."

And she succeeded for a time as we have seen, but she overrated her will and underrated her heart that with a deepening intensity craved the love denied her. With increasing frequency she said to herself, "I must go away. My only course is to hide my weakness and never see him again. He is inflexible, and yet his very obduracy increases my love a hundredfold."

At last after a lonely walk on the beach she concluded: "My guardian must take me home on Monday next. He comes to-night to spend Sunday with us, and I will make preparations to go at once."

Although her resolution did not fail her she walked forward more and more slowly, and her dejection and weariness were almost overpowering. As she was turning a sharp angle of rocks that jutted well down toward the water she came face to face with Ackland and Mrs. Alston. She was off her guard, and her thoughts of him had been so absorbing that she felt he must be conscious of them. She flushed painfully, and at first it seemed that she would hurry by with slight recognition and

downcast face, but she had scarcely passed them before, acting under a sudden impulse, she stopped and said in a low tone :

“ Mr. Ackland—”

He turned expectantly toward her, and she either forgot or ignored Mrs. Alston. For a moment she found it difficult to speak, and then her face became pale and resolute.

“ Mr. Ackland, I must refer once more to a topic which you have in a sense forbidden. I feel partially absolved, however, for I do not think you have forgiven me anything. At any rate I must ask your pardon once more for having so needlessly and foolishly imperilled your life. I say these words now because I may not have another opportunity ; we leave on Monday.” And she raised her eyes to his with an appeal for a little kindness which Mrs. Alston was confident could not be resisted. Indeed she was sure that she saw a slight nervous tremor in Ackland’s hands as if he found it hard to control himself. Then he appeared to grow rigid. Lifting his hat, he said gravely and unresponsively :

“ Miss Van Tyne, you now surely have made

ample amends. Please forget the whole affair."

She turned from him at once, but not so quickly but that both he and his cousin saw the bitter tears that would come. A moment later she was hidden by the angle of the rock. As long as she was visible Ackland watched her without moving, and then he slowly turned toward his cousin, and his face was as inscrutable as ever. She walked at his side for a few moments in ill-concealed impatience, then stopped and said decisively :

"I'll go no farther with you to-day. I am losing all respect for you."

Without speaking he turned to accompany her back to the house. His reticence and coldness appeared to annoy her beyond endurance, for she soon stopped, and sat down on a ledge of the rocks that jutted down the beach where they had met Miss Van Tyne.

"John, you are the most unnatural man I ever saw in my life," she began angrily.

"What reason have you for so flattering an opinion?" he asked coolly.

"You have been giving reason for it every

day since you came here," she resumed hotly. "I always heard it said that you had no heart, but I defended you, and declared that your course toward your mother even when a boy showed that you had, and that you would prove it some day. But I now believe that you are unnaturally cold, heartless, and unfeeling. I had no objection to your wounding Miss Van Tyne's vanity, and encouraged you when that alone bid fair to suffer. But when she proved she had a heart and that you had awakened it, she deserved at least kindness and consideration on your part. If you could not return her affection, you should have gone away at once. But I believe that you have stayed for the sole and cruel purpose of gloating over her suffering."

"She has not suffered more than my friend or than I would if—"

"You indeed! The idea of you suffering from any such cause! I half believe you came here with the deliberate purpose of avenging your friend, and that you are keeping for his inspection a diary in which the poor girl's humiliation to-day will form the hateful climax."

They did not dream that the one most interested was so near. Miss Van Tyne had felt too faint and sorely wounded to go farther without rest. Believing that the rocks would hide her from those whose eyes she would most wish to shun, she had thrown herself down beyond the angle, and was shedding the bitterest tears that she had ever known. Suddenly she heard Mrs. Alston's words but a short distance away, and was so overcome by their import that she hesitated what to do. She would not meet them again for the world, but felt so weak that she doubted whether she could drag herself away without being discovered, especially as the beach trended off to the left so sharply a little farther on that they might discover her. While she was looking vainly for some way of escape she heard Ackland's words and Mrs. Alston's surmise in reply that he had come with the purpose of revenge. She was so stung by their apparent truth that she resolved to clamber up through an opening of the rocks if the thing were possible. Panting and exhausted she gained the summit, and then hastened to an adjacent grove, as some

wounded, timid creature would run to the nearest cover. Ackland had heard sounds and had stepped around the point of the rocks just in time to see her disappearing above the bank. Returning to Mrs. Alston he said impatiently :

"In view of your opinions my society can have no attractions for you. Shall I accompany you to the hotel?"

"No," was the angry reply. "I'm in no mood to speak to you again to-day."

He merely bowed and turned as if to pursue his walk. The moment she was hidden, however, he also climbed the rocks in time to see Miss Van Tyne entering the grove. With swift and silent tread he followed her, but could not at once discover her hiding-place. At last passionate sobs made it evident that she was concealed behind a great oak a little on his left. Approaching cautiously he heard her moan :

"Oh, this is worse than death! He makes me feel as if even God had no mercy for me. But I will expiate my wrong—I will, at the bitterest sacrifice which a woman can make."

She sprang up and Ackland stood before her

with folded arms. She started violently and leaned against the tree for support. But the weakness was momentary, for she wiped the tears from her eyes, and then turned toward him so quietly that only her extreme pallor proved that she realized the import of her words.

"Mr. Ackland," she asked, "have you Mr. Munson's address?"

It was his turn now to start, but he merely answered, "Yes."

"Do—do you think he still cares for me?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Since then you are so near a friend, will you write to him that I will try"—she turned away and would not look at him as, after a moment's hesitation, she concluded her sentence—"I will try to make him as happy as I can."

"Do you regret your course?" he asked, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"I regret that I misled—that I wronged him beyond all words. I am willing to make all the amends in my power."

"Do you love him?"

She now turned wholly away and shook her head.

"And yet you would marry him?"

"Yes, if he wished it, knowing all the truth."

"Can you believe he would wish it?" he asked indignantly. "Can you believe that any man—"

"Then avenge him to your cruel soul's content," she exclaimed passionately. "Tell him that I have no heart to give to him or to any one. Through no effort or fault of mine I overheard Mrs. Alston's words and yours. I know your design against me. Assuage your friend's grief by assuring him of your entire success of which you are already so well aware. Tell him how you triumphed over an untaught, thoughtless girl who was impelled merely by the love of power and excitement as you are governed by ambition and a remorseless will. I did not know—I did not understand how cruel I was, although now that I do know I shall never forgive myself. But if you had the heart of a man you might have seen that you were subjecting me to torture. I did not ask

or expect that you should care for me, but I had a right to hope for a little kindness, a little manly and delicate consideration, a little healing sympathy for the almost mortal wound that you have made. But I now see that you have stood by and watched like a grand inquisitor. Tell your friend that you have transferred the thoughtless girl into a suffering woman. I cannot go to Brazil. I cannot face dangers that might bring rest. I must keep my place in society—keep it too under a hundred observant and curious eyes. You have seen it all of late in this house; I was too wretched to care. It was part of my punishment, and I accepted it. I would not be false again even in trying to conceal a secret which it is like death to a woman to reveal. I only craved one word of kindness from you. Had I received it I would have gone away in silence and suffered in silence. But your course and what I have heard have made me reckless and despairing. You do not leave me even the poor consolation of self-sacrifice. You are my stony-hearted fate. I wish you had left me to drown. Tell your friend that I am more

wretched than he ever can be, because I am a woman. Will he be satisfied?"

"He ought to be," was the low, husky reply.

"Are you proud of your triumph?"

"No, I am heartily ashamed of it; but I have kept a pledge that will probably cost me far more than it has you."

"A pledge?"

"Yes, my pledge to make you suffer as far as possible as he suffered."

She put her hand to her side as if she had received a wound, and after a moment said wearily and coldly:

"Well, tell him that you succeeded, and be content," and she turned to leave him.

"Stay," he cried impetuously. "It is now your turn. Take your revenge."

"My revenge?" she repeated in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, your revenge. I have loved you from the moment I hoped you had a woman's heart, yes and before—when I feared I might not be able to save your life. I know it now, though the very thought of it enraged me then. I

have watched and waited more to be sure that you had a woman's heart than for aught else, though a false sense of honour kept me true to my pledge. After I met you on the beach I determined at once to break my odious bond and place myself at your mercy. You may refuse me in view of my course—you probably will; but every one in that house there shall know that you refused me, and your triumph shall be more complete than mine."

She looked into his face with an expression of amazement and doubt, but instead of coldness, there was now a devotion and pleading that she had never seen before.

She was too confused and astounded, however to comprehend his words immediately, nor could the impression of his hostility toward her pass away readily.

"You are mocking me," she faltered, scarcely knowing what she said.

"I cannot blame you that you think me capable of mocking the noble candour which has cost you so dear, as I can now understand. I cannot ask you to believe that I appreciate your heroic impulse of self-sacrifice—your pur-

pose to atone for wrong by inflicting irreparable wrong on yourself. It is natural that you should think of me only as an instrument of revenge, with no more feeling than some keen-edged weapon would have. This also is the inevitable penalty of my course. When I speak of my love I cannot complain if you smile in bitter incredulity. But I have at least proved that I have a resolute will and that I keep my word, and I again assure you that it shall be known this very night that you have refused me, that I offered you my hand, that you already had my heart where your image is enshrined with that of my mother, and that I entreated you to be my wife. My cousin alone guessed my miserable triumph; all shall know of yours."

As he spoke with impassioned earnestness the confusor passed from her mind, she felt the truth of his words, she knew that her ambitious dream had been fulfilled, and that she had achieved the conquest of a man upon whom all others had smiled in vain. But how immeasurably different were her emotions from those which she had once anticipated; not her

beauty, not her consummate skill in fascination had wrought this miracle, but her woman's heart, awakened at last; and it had thrilled with such an unspeakable joy that she had turned away to hide its reflex in her face. He was misled by the act into believing that she could not forgive him, and yet was perplexed when she murmured with a return of her old piquant humour,

"You are mistaken, Mr. Ackland; it shall never be known that I refused you."

"How can you prevent it?"

"If your words are sincere, you will submit to such terms as I choose to make."

"I am sincere, and my actions shall prove it, but I shall permit no mistaken self-sacrifice on your part, nor any attempt to shield me from the punishment I well deserve."

She suddenly turned upon him a radiant face in which he read his happiness, and faltered:

"Jack, I do believe you, although the change seems wrought by some heavenly magic. But it will take a long time to pay you up. I hope to be your dear torment for a lifetime."

He caught her in such a strong, impetuous embrace that she gasped :

"I thought you were — cold toward our sex."

"It's not your sex that I am clasping, but you — *you*, my Eve. Like the first man, I have won my bride under the green trees and beneath the open sky."

"Yes, Jack, and I give you my whole heart as truly as did the first woman when there was but one man in all the world. That is *my revenge*."

This is what Will Munson wrote some weeks later :—

"Well, Jack, I've had the yellow fever, and it was the most fortunate event of my life. I was staying with a charming family, and they would not permit my removal to a hospital. One of my bravest and most devoted nurses has consented to become my wife. I hope you punished that little wretch Eva Van Tyne as she deserved."

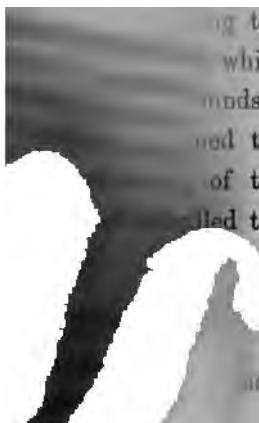
"Confound your fickle soul!" muttered Ackland. "I punished her as she did not deserve, and I risked more than life in doing so. If her heart had not been as good as gold and as kind

as Heaven she never would have looked at me again."

Ackland is quite as indifferent to the sex as ever, but Eva has never complained that he was cold toward her.

WAR TIMES.

... of a battle. The
... advance was sweep-
... mountainous region in
... place on the extreme left
... ate Anson Marlow. Tall
... lerbrush, rocks, boulders,
... g torrents, were the charac-
... which was in wild contrast
... mds on which the combat-
... ed the tactics of war. The
... of those now in the ranks
... lled too often under like cir-
... lead and iron-shotted
... duty, and the lines of
... as the broken country
... any obstacles permitted



Marlow kept his proper distance from the others on the line, and fired coolly when he caught glimpses of the retreating Confederate skirmishers. They were retiring with ominous readiness toward a wooded height which the enemy occupied with a force of unknown strength. That strength was soon manifested in temporary disaster to the Union forces, which were driven back with heavy loss.

Neither the battle nor its fortunes are the objects of our present concern, but rather the fate of Private Marlow. The tide of battle drifted away and left the soldier desperately wounded, in a narrow ravine, through which babbled a small stream. Excepting the voices of his wife and children, no music had ever sounded so sweetly in his ears. With great difficulty he crawled to a little bubbling pool formed by a tiny cascade and encircling stones, and partially slaked his intolerable thirst.

He believed he was dying — bleeding to death. The very thought blunted his faculties for a time, and he was conscious of little beyond a dull wonder. Could it be possible *that* the tragedy of his death was enacting in

that peaceful, secluded nook? Could nature be so indifferent or so unconscious, if it were true that he was soon to lie there *dead*? He saw the speckled trout lying motionless at the bottom of the pool, the gray squirrels sporting in the boughs over his head. The sunlight shimmered and glinted through the leaves, flecking with light his prostrate form. He dipped his hand in the blood that had welled from his side, and it fell in rubies from his fingers. Could that be his blood—his life-blood, and would it soon all ooze away? Could it be that death was coming through all the brightness of that summer afternoon?

From a shadowed tree farther up the glen, a wood-thrush suddenly began its almost unrivalled song. The familiar melody, heard so often from his cottage-porch in the June twilight, awoke him to the bitter truth. His wife had then sat beside him, while his little ones played here and there among the trees and shrubbery. They would hear the same song to-day would never hear it again. That too little, but the thought of their sitting under the vines and listening to their

favourite bird spring after spring and summer after summer, and he ever absent, overwhelmed him.

"O Gertrude, my wife, my wife! O my children!" he groaned.

His breast heaved with a great sigh; the blood welled afresh from his wound; what seemed a mortal weakness crept over him, and he thought he died.

* * * * *

"Say, Eb, is he done gone?"

"'Clar to grashus if I know. 'Pears mighty like it."

These words were spoken by two stout negroes, who had stolen toward the battle-field as the sounds of conflict died away.

"I'm doggoned if I tink he's dead. He's only swooned," asserted the man addressed as Eb. "'Twon't do to lebe 'im here to die, Zack."

"Sartin not; we'd hab bad luck all our days."

"I reckon ole man Pearson will keep him, and his wife's a po'ful nuss."

"Pearson orter; he's a Unioner."

"S'pose we try him; 'tain't so bery fur off."

* * * * *

On the morning of the 24th of December, Mrs. Anson Marlow sat in the living-room of her cottage, that stood well out in the suburbs of a Northern town. Her eyes were hollow and full of trouble that seemed almost beyond tears, and the bare room, that had been stripped of nearly every appliance and suggestion of comfort, but too plainly indicated one of the causes. Want was stamped on her thin face, that once had been so full and pretty: poverty in its bitter extremity was unmistakably shown by the uncarpeted floor, the meagre fire and scanty furniture. It was a period of depression; work had been scarce, and much of the time she had been too ill and feeble to do more than care for her children. Away back in August her resources had been running low, but she had daily expected the long arrears of pay which her husband would receive as soon as the exigencies of the campaign permitted. Instead of these funds, so greatly needed, came the tidings of a Union defeat.

with her husband's name down among the missing. Beyond that brief mention, so horrible in its vagueness, she had never heard a word from the one who not only sustained her home but also her heart. Was he languishing in a Southern prison, or, mortally wounded, had he lingered out some terrible hours on that wild battle-field, a brief description of which had been so dwelt upon by her morbid fancy that it had become like one of the scenes in Dante's "Inferno?" For a long time she could not and would not believe that such an overwhelming disaster had befallen her and her children, although she knew that similar losses had come to thousands of others. Events that the world regards as not only possible but probable are often so terrible in their personal consequences that we shrink from even the bare thought of their occurrence.

If Mrs. Marlow had been told from the first that her husband was dead, the shock resulting would not have been so injurious as the suspense that robbed her of rest for days, weeks, and months. She haunted the post-office, and if a stranger was seen coming up the street

toward her cottage she watched feverishly for his turning in at her gate with the tidings of her husband's safety. Night after night she lay awake, hoping, praying that she might hear his step returning on a furlough to which wounds or sickness had entitled him. The natural and inevitable result was illness and nervous prostration.

Practical neighbours had told her that her course was all wrong; that she should be resigned and even cheerful for her children's sake; that she needed to sleep well and live well in order that she might have strength to provide for them. She would make pathetic attempts to follow this sound and thrifty advice, but suddenly, when at her work or in her troubled sleep, that awful word "missing" would pierce her heart like an arrow, and she would moan and at times, in the depths of her anguish, cry out, "Oh, where is he? Shall I ever see him again?"

But the unrelenting demands of life are made as surely upon the breaking as upon the happy heart. She and her children must have food, clothing and shelter. Her illness and

feebleness at last taught her that she must not yield to her grief, except so far as she was unable to suppress it; that, for the sake of those now seemingly dependent upon her, she must rally every shattered nerve and every relaxed muscle. With a heroism far beyond that of her husband and his comrades in the field, she sought to fight the wolf from the door, or at least to keep him at bay. Although the struggle seemed a hopeless one, she patiently did her best from day to day, eking out her scanty earnings by the sale or pawn of such of her household goods as she could best spare. She felt that she would do anything rather than reveal her poverty or accept charity. Some help was more or less kindly offered, but beyond such aid as one neighbour may receive of another she had said gently but firmly, "Not yet."

The Marlows were comparative strangers in the city where they had resided. Her husband had been a teacher in one of its public schools and his salary small. Patriotism had been his motive for entering the army, and, while it had cost him a mighty struggle to leave his family,

he felt that he had no more reason to hold back than thousands of others. He believed that he could still provide for those dependent upon him, and if he fell, those for whom he died would not permit his widow and children to suffer. But the first popular enthusiasm for the war had largely died out; the city was full of widows and orphans; there was depression of spirit, stagnation in business, and a very general disposition on the part of those who had means, to take care of themselves, and provide for darker days that might be in the immediate future. Sensitive, retiring Mrs. Marlow was not the one to push her claims or reveal her need. Moreover, she could never give up the hope that tidings from her husband might, at any time, bring relief and safety.

But the crisis had come at last, and on this dreary December day she was face to face with absolute want. The wolf, with his gaunt eyes, was crouched beside her cold hearth. A pittance owed to her for work had not been paid; the little food left in the house had furnished the children an unsatisfying breakfast; she had eaten nothing. On the table beside her

lay a note from the agent of the estate of which her home was a part, bidding her call that morning. She knew why—the rent was two months in arrears. It seemed like death to leave the house in which her husband had placed her and wherein she had spent her happiest days. It stood well away from the crowded town. The little yard and garden, with their trees, vines and shrubbery, some of which her husband had planted, were all dear from association. In the rear there was a grove and open fields, which, though not belonging to the cottage, were not forbidden to the children, and they formed a wonderland of delight in spring, summer and fall. Must she take her active, restless boy Jamie, the image of his father, into a crowded tenement? Must golden-haired Susie, with her dower of beauty, be imprisoned in one close room, or else be exposed to the evil of corrupt association just beyond the threshold?

Moreover, her retired home had become a refuge. Here she could hide her sorrow and poverty. Here she could touch what he had touched, and sit during the long winter even-

ings, in his favourite corner by the fire. Around her, within and without, were the little appliances for her comfort which his hands had made. How could she leave all this and live ? Deep in her heart also the hope would linger that he would come again and seek her where he had left her.

"O God !" she cried suddenly. "Thou wouldst not, couldst not, permit him to die without one farewell word," and she buried her face in her hands and rocked back and forth, while hard, dry sobs shook her slight famine-pinched form.

The children stopped their play and came and leaned upon her lap.

"Don't cry, mother," said Jamie, a little boy of ten ; "I'll soon be big enough to work for you, and I'll get rich, and you shall have the biggest house in town. I'll take care of you if papa don't come back."

Little Sue knew not what to say, but the mother's love was her best guide. She clasped them around her mother's neck with a spontaneous and child-like outburst of affection. The poor woman's bitter and

despairing thoughts were banished for a time. The deepest chord of her nature, mother love, was touched, and for her children's sake she rose up once more and faced the hard problems of her life. Putting on her bonnet and thin shawl (she had parted with much that she now so sorely needed), she went out into the cold December wind. The sky was clouded like her hopes, and the light, even in the morning hours, was dim and leaden-hued.

She first called on Mr. Jackson, the agent from whom she rented her home, and besought him to give her a little more time.

"I will beg for work from door to door," she said. "Surely in this Christian city there must be those who will give me work, and that is all I ask."

The sleek, comfortable man in his well-appointed office, was touched slightly, and said in a voice that was not so gruff as he at first had intended it should be :

"Well, I will wait a week or two longer. If then you cannot pay something on what is already due, my duty to my employers will compel me to take the usual course, You

have told me all along that your husband would surely return, and I have hated to say a word to discourage you; but I fear you will have to bring yourself to face the truth and act accordingly, as so many others have done. I know it's very hard for you, but I am held responsible by my employer, and at my intercession he has been lenient, as you must admit. You could get a room or two in town for half what you must pay where you are. Good-morning."

She went out again into the street, which the shrouded sky made sombre in spite of preparations seen on every side for the chief festival of the year. The fear was growing strong that like Him, in whose memory the day was honoured, she and her little ones might soon not know where to lay their heads. She succeeded in getting the small sum owed to her and payment also for some sewing just finished. More work she could not readily obtain, for every one was busy and preoccupied by the coming day of gladness.

"Call again," some said kindly or carelessly, according to their nature. "After the holidays

are over we will try to have or make some work for you."

"But I need—I must have work now," she ventured to say whenever she had the chance.

In response to this appeal there were a few offers of charity, small indeed, but from which she drew back with an instinct so strong that it could not be overcome. On every side she heard the same story. The times were very hard; requests for work and aid had been so frequent that purses and patience were exhausted. Moreover, people had spent their Christmas money on their own households and friends, and were already beginning to feel poor.

At last she obtained a little work, and having made a few purchases of that which was absolutely essential, she was about to drag her weary feet homeward when the thought occurred to her that the children would want to hang up their stockings at night, and she murmured, "It may be the last chance I shall ever have to put a Christmas gift in them. Oh, that I were stronger! Oh, that I could take my sorrow more as others seem to take theirs! But

I cannot, I cannot. My burden is greater than I can bear. The cold of this awful day is chilling my very heart, and my grief, as hope dies, is crushing my soul. Oh, he must be dead, he must be dead! That is what they all think. God help my little ones! Oh, what will become of them if I sink, as I fear I shall! If it were not for them I feel as if I would fall and die here in the street. Well, be our fate what it may, they shall owe to me one more gleam of happiness," and she went into a confectioner's shop and bought a few ornamented cakes. These were the only gifts she could afford, and they must be in the form of food.

Before she reached home the snow was whirling in the frosty air, and the shadows of the brief winter day deepening fast. With a smile far more pathetic than tears she greeted the children, who were cold, hungry, and frightened at her long absence; and they, children-like, saw only the smile, and not the grief it masked. They saw also the basket which she placed on the table, and were quick to note that it seemed a little fuller than of late.

"Jamie," she said, "run to the store down the street for some coal and kindlings that I bought, and then we will have a good fire and a nice supper," and the boy, at such a prospect, eagerly obeyed.

She was glad to have him gone that she might hide her weakness. She sank into a chair, so white and faint that even little Susie left off peering into the basket, and came to her with a troubled face.

"It's nothing, dearie," the poor creature said, "Mamma's only a little tired. See," she added, tottering to the table, "I have brought you a great piece of gingerbread."

The hungry child grasped it, and was oblivious and happy.

By the time Jamie returned with his first basket of kindling and coal, the mother had so far rallied from her exhaustion as to meet him smilingly again and help him replenish the dying fire.

"Now you shall rest and have your gingerbread before going for your second load," she said cheerily, and the boy took what was ambrosia to him and danced around the room in

joyous reaction from the depression of the long, weary day, during which, lonely and hungry, he had wondered why his mother did not return.

"So little could make them happy, and yet I cannot seem to obtain even that little," she sighed. "I fear—indeed, I fear—I cannot be with them another Christmas; therefore they shall remember that I tried to make them happy once more, and the recollection may survive the long, sad days before them, and become a part of my memory."

The room was now growing dark, and she lighted the lamp. Then she cowered shiveringly over the reviving fire, feeling as if she could never be warm again.

The street-lamps were lighted early on that clouded, stormy evening, and they were a signal to Mr. Jackson, the agent, to leave his office. He remembered that he had ordered a holiday dinner, and now found himself in a mood to enjoy it. He had scarcely left his door before a man, coming up the street with great strides and head bent down to the snow-laden blast, brushed roughly against

him. The stranger's cap was drawn over his eyes and the raised collar of his blue army overcoat nearly concealed his face. The man hurriedly begged pardon, and was hastening on when Mr. Jackson's exclamation of surprise caused him to stop and look at the person he had jostled.

"Why, Mr. Marlow," the agent began, "I'm glad to see you. It's a pleasure I feared I should never have again."

"My wife," the man almost gasped; "she's still in the house I rented of you?"

"Oh, certainly," was the hasty reply. "It'll be all right now."

"What do you mean? Has it not been all right?"

"Well, you see," said Mr. Jackson apologetically, "we have been very lenient toward your wife, but the rent has not been paid for over two months, and—"

"And you were about to turn her and her children out of doors in midwinter," broke in the soldier wrathfully. "That is the way you sleek, comfortable, stay-at-home people care for those fighting your battles. After you con-

cluded that I was dead, and that the rent might not be forthcoming, you decided to put my wife into the street. Open your office, sir, and you shall have your rent."

"Now, Mr. Marlow, there's no cause for pitching into me in this way. You know that I am but an agent, and—"

"Tell your rich employer, then, what I have said, and ask him what he would be worth to-day were there not men like myself, who are willing to risk everything and suffer everything for the Union. But I've no time to bandy words. Have you seen my wife lately?"

"Yes," was the hesitating reply; "she was here to-day, and I—"

"How is she? What did you say to her?"

"Well, she doesn't look very strong. I felt sorry for her and gave her more time, taking the responsibility myself—"

"How much time?"

"I said two weeks, but no doubt I could have had the time extended."

"I have *my* doubts. Will you and your employer please accept my humble gratitude that you had the grace not to turn her out of

doors during the holiday season. It might have caused remark, but that consideration and some others that I might name are not to be weighed against a few dollars and cents. I shall now remove the strain upon your patriotism at once, and will not only pay arrears, but also for two months in advance."

"Oh, there's no need of that to-day."

"Yes, there is. My wife shall feel to-night that she has a home. She evidently has not received the letter I wrote as soon as I reached our lines, or you would not have been talking to her about two weeks more of shelter."

The agent reopened his office and saw a roll of bills extracted from Marlow's pocket that left no doubt of the soldier's ability to provide for his family. He gave his receipt in silence, feeling that words would not mend matters, and then trudged off to his dinner with a flagging appetite.

As Marlow strode away he came to a sudden resolution—he would look upon his wife and children before they saw him; he would feast his eyes while they were unconscious of the love that was beaming upon them. The dark-

ness and storm favoured his project, and in brief time he saw the light in his window. Unlatching the gate softly and with his steps muffled by the snow that already carpeted the frozen ground he reached the window, the blinds of which were but partially closed. His children frolicking about the room were the first objects that caught his eye, and he almost laughed aloud in his joy. Then, by turning another blind slightly, he saw his wife shivering over the fire.

"Great God!" he muttered, "how she has suffered!" and he was about to rush in and take her into his arms. On the threshold he restrained himself, paused, and said, "No, not yet; I'll break the news of my return in my own way. The shock of my sudden appearance might be too great for her;" and he went back to the window. The wife's eyes were following her children with such a wistful tenderness that the boy, catching her gaze, stopped his sport, came to her side and began to speak. They were but a few feet away, and Marlow caught every word.

"Mamma," the child said, "you didn't eat

any breakfast, and I don't believe you have eaten anything to-day. You are always giving everything to us. Now I declare I won't eat another bit unless you take half of my cake," and he broke off a piece and laid it in her lap.

"Oh, Jamie," cried the poor woman, "you looked so like your father when you spoke that I could almost see him," and she caught him in her arms and covered him with kisses.

"I'll soon be big enough to take care of you, I'm going to grow up just like papa and do everything for you," the boy said proudly as she released him.

Little Susie also came and placed what was left of her cake in her mother's lap, saying :

"I'll work for you, too, mamma, and tomorrow I'll sell the doll Santa Claus gave me last Christmas, and then we'll all have plenty to eat."

Anson Marlow was sobbing outside the window as only a man weeps, and his tears in the bitter cold became drops of ice before they reached the ground.

"My darlings!" the mother cried. "O God, spare me to you and provide some way

for us. Your love should make me rich though I lack all else. There, I won't cry any more, and you shall have as happy a Christmas as I can give you. Perhaps He who knew what it was to be homeless and shelterless will provide for our need; so we'll try to trust Him and keep His birthday. And now, Jamie, go and bring the rest of the coal, and then we will make the dear home that papa gave us cheery and warm once more. If he were only with us we wouldn't mind hunger or cold, would we? O my husband!" she broke out afresh, "if you could only come back, even though crippled and helpless, I feel that I could live and grow strong from simple gladness."

"Don't you think, mamma," Jamie asked, "that God will let papa come down from heaven and spend Christmas with us? He might be here like the angels, and we not see him."

"I'm afraid not," the sad woman replied, shaking her head and speaking more to herself than to the child. "I don't see how he could go back to heaven and be happy if he knew all. No, we must be patient and try to do

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our best, so that we can go to him. Go now, Jamie, before it gets too late. I'll get supper, and then we'll sing a Christmas hymn, and you and Susie shall hang up your stockings, just as you did last Christmas, when dear papa was with us. We'll try to do everything he would wish, and then by-and-by we shall see him again."

As the boy started on his errand his father stepped back out of the light of the window, then followed the child with a great yearning in his heart. He would make sure the boy was safe at home again before he carried out his plan. From a distance he saw the little fellow receive the coal and start slowly homeward with the burden, and he followed to a point where the light of the street lamps ceased, then joined the child, and said in a gruff voice, "Here, little man, I'm going your way. Let me carry your basket;" and he took it and strode on so fast that the boy had to run to keep pace with him. Jamie shuffled along through the snow as well as he could, but his little legs were so short in comparison with those of the kindly stranger that he found him-

self gradually falling behind. So he put on an extra burst of speed and managed to lay hold of the long blue skirt of the army overcoat.

"Please, sir, don't go quite so fast," he panted.

The stranger slackened his pace, and in a constrained tone of voice, asked :

"How far are you going, little man?"

"Only to our house—mamma's. She's Mrs. Marlow, you know."

"Yes, I know—that is, I reckon I do. How much farther is it?"

"Oh, not much; we're most half-way now. I say, you're a soldier, aren't you?"

"Yes, my boy," said Marlow, with a lump in his throat. "Why?"

"Well, you see, my papa is a soldier, too, and I thought you might know him. We haven't heard from him for a good while, and—" choking a bit—"mamma's afraid he is hurt, or taken prisoner or something." He could not bring himself to say "killed."

Jamie let go the overcoat to draw his sleeve across his eyes, and the big man once more strode on faster than ever, and Jamie began to

fear lest the dusky form might disappear in the snow and darkness with both basket and coal, but the apparent stranger so far forgot his part that he put down the basket at Mrs. Marlow's gate, and then passed on so quickly that the panting boy had not time to thank him. Indeed Anson Marlow knew that if he lingered but a moment he would have the child in his arms.

"Why, Jamie," exclaimed his mother, "how could you get back so soon with that heavy basket? It was too heavy for you, but you will have to be mamma's little man now."

"A big man caught up with me and carried it. I don't care if he did have a gruff voice, I'm sure he was a good, kind man. He knew where we lived, too, for he put the basket down at our gate before I could say a word, I was so out of breath, and then he was out of sight in a minute." Some instinct kept him from saying anything about the army overcoat.

"It's some neighbour that lives farther up the street, I suppose, and saw you getting the coal at the store," Mrs. Marlow said. "Yes, Jamie, it was a good, kind act to help a little

boy, and I think he'll have a happier Christmas for doing it."

"Do you really think he'll have a happier Christmas, mamma?"

"Yes, I truly think so. We are so made that we cannot do a kind act without feeling the better for it."

"Well, I think he was a queer sort of a man if he was kind. I never knew any one to walk so fast. I spoke to him once, but he did not answer. Perhaps the wind roared so he couldn't hear me."

"No doubt he was hurrying home to his wife and children," she said, with a deep sigh.

When his boy disappeared within the door of the cottage, Marlow turned and walked rapidly toward the city, first going to the grocery at which he had been in the habit of purchasing his supplies. The merchant stared for a moment, then stepped forward and greeted his customer warmly.

"Well," he said, after his first exclamations of surprise were over, "the snow has made you almost as white as a ghost, but I'm glad

you're not one. We scarce ever thought to see you again."

"Has my wife an open account here now?" was the brief response.

"Yes, and it might have been much larger. I've told her so, too. She stopped taking credit some time ago, and when she's had a dollar or two to spare she's paid it on the old score. She bought so little that I said to her once that she need not go elsewhere to buy—that I'd sell it to her as cheap as any one; that I believed you'd come back all right, and if you didn't she could pay me when she could. What do you think she did? Why she burst out crying, and said, 'God bless you, sir, for saying my husband will come back. So many have discouraged me.' I declare to you her feeling was so right down genuine that I had to mop my own eyes. But she wouldn't take any more credit, and she bought so little that I've been troubled. I'd have sent her something, but your wife somehow ain't one of them kind that you can give things to, and—"

Marlow interrupted the good-hearted, garrulous shopman by saying significantly, "Come

with me to your back-office ;" for the soldier feared that some one might enter who would recognize him and carry the tidings to his home prematurely.

"Mr. Wilkins," he said rapidly, "I wanted to find out if you, too, had thriftily shut down on a soldier's wife. You shall not regret your kindness."

"Hang it all," broke in Wilkins with compunction, "I haven't been very kind. I ought to have gone and seen your wife and found out how things were, and I meant to, but I've been so confoundedly busy—"

"No matter now, I've not a moment to spare. You must help me to break the news of my return in my own way. I mean they shall have such a Christmas in the little cottage as was never known in this town. You could send a load right over there, couldn't you ?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Wilkins, under the impulse of both business thrift and goodwill, and a list of tea, coffee, sugar, flour, bread, cakes, apples, etc., was dashed off rapidly ; and Marlow had the satisfaction of seeing the errand-boy, the two clerks and the proprietor himself busily work-

ing to fill the order in the shortest possible space of time.

He next went to a restaurant, a little farther down the street, where he had taken his meals for a short time before he brought his family to town, and was greeted with almost equal surprise and warmth. Marlow cut short all words by his almost feverish haste. A huge turkey had just been roasted for the needs of the coming holiday, and this with a cold ham and a pot of coffee was ordered to be sent in a covered tray within a quarter of an hour. Then a toy-shop was visited, and such a doll purchased! for tears came into Marlow's eyes whenever he thought of his child's offer to sell her dolly for her mother's sake.

After selecting a sled for Jamie, and directing that they should be sent at once, he could restrain his impatience no longer, and almost tore back to his station at the cottage window. His wife was placing the meagre little supper on the table, and how poor and scanty it was!

"Is that the best the dear soul can do on Christmas eve?" he groaned. "Why, there's scarcely enough for little Sue. Thank God,

my darling, I will sit down with you to a rather different supper before long."

He bowed his head reverently with his wife as she asked God's blessing, and wondered at her faith. Then he looked and listened again with a heart-hunger which had been growing for months.

"Do you really think Santa Claus will fill our stockings to-night?" Sue asked.

"I think he'll have something for you," she replied. "There are so many poor little boys and girls in the city that he may not be able to bring very much to you."

"Who is Santa Claus, anyway?" questioned Jamie.

Tears came into the wife's eyes as she thought of the one who had always remembered them so kindly as far as his modest means permitted.

She hesitated in her reply, and before she could decide upon an answer there was a knock at the door. Jamie ran to open it, and started back as a man entered with cap, eyebrows, beard and shaggy coat all white with the falling snow. He placed two great baskets of

provisions on the floor, and said they were for Mrs. Anson Marlow.

"There is some mistake," Mrs. Marlow began, but the children, after staring a moment, shouted, "Santa Claus! Santa Claus!"

The grocer's man took the unexpected cue instantly, and said, "No mistake, ma'am. They are from Santa Claus;" and before another word could be spoken he was gone. The face of the grocer's man was not very familiar to Mrs. Marlow, and the snow had disguised him completely. The children had no misgivings and pounced upon the baskets, and, with exclamations of delight, drew out such articles as they could lift.

"I can't understand it," said the mother, bewildered and almost frightened.

"Why, mamma, it's as plain as day," cried Jamie. "Didn't he look just like the pictures of Santa Claus—white beard and white eyebrows? Oh, mamma, mamma, here is a great paper of red-cheeked apples;" and he and Susie tugged at it until they dragged it over the side of the basket, when the bottom of the bag came out, and the fruit flecked the floor

with red and gold. Oh, the bliss of picking up those apples ; of comparing one with another—of running to the mother and asking which was the biggest and which the reddest and most beautifully streaked !

“There must have been some mistake,” the poor woman kept murmuring as she examined the baskets and found how liberal and varied was the supply, “for who could or would have been so kind ?”

“Why, mommie,” said little Sue, reproachfully, “Santa Claus brought ’em. Haven’t you always told us that Santa Claus liked to make us happy ?”

The long-exiled father felt that he could restrain himself but a few moments longer, and he was glad to see that the rest of his purchases were at the door. With a look so intent, and yearning concentration of thought so intense, that it was strange that they could not feel his presence, he bent his eyes once more upon a scene that would imprint itself upon his memory for ever.

But while he stood there another scene came before his mental vision. Oddly enough his

thought went back to that far-off Southern brookside, where he had lain with his hands in the cool water. He leaned against the window-casing, with the Northern snow whirling about his head, but he breathed the balmy breath of a Southern forest, the wood-thrush sang in the trees overhead, and he could—so it seemed to him—actually feel the water-worn pebbles under his palms as he watched the life-blood ebbing from his side. Then there was a dim consciousness of rough but kindly arms bearing him through the underbrush, and more distinctly the memory of weary weeks of convalescence in a mountaineer's cabin. All these scenes of peril, before he finally reached the Union lines, passed before him as he stood in a species of trance beside the window of his home.

The half-grown boys sent from the restaurant and toy-shop could not be mistaken for Santa Claus even by the credulous fancy of the children, and Mrs. Marlow stepped forward eagerly, and said :

"I am sure there is some mistake. You are *certainly* leaving these articles at the wrong

house." The faces of the children began to grow anxious and troubled also, for even their faith could not accept such marvellous good fortune. Jamie looked at the sled with a kind of awe, and saw at a glance that it was handsomer than any in the street. "Mr. Lansing, a wealthy man, lives a little farther on," Mrs. Marlow began to urge, "and these things must be meant—"

"Isn't your name Mrs. Anson Marlow?" asked the boy from the restaurant.

"Yes."

"Then I must do as I've been told;" and he opened his tray and placed the turkey, the ham and the coffee on the table.

"If he's right, I'm right, too," said he of the toy-shop. "Them was my directions;" and they were both about to depart when the woman sprang forward and gasped:

"Stay!"

She clasped her hands and trembled violently.

"Who sent these things?" she faltered.

"Our bosses, mum," replied the boy from the restaurant, hesitatingly.

She sprang toward him, seized his arm, and

looked imploringly into his face. "Who ordered them sent?" she asked, in a low, passionate voice.

The young fellow began to smile, and stammered awkwardly, "I don't think I'm to tell."

She released his arm, and glanced around with a look of intense expectation.

"Oh, oh!" she gasped, with quick, short sobs, "can it be—" Then she sprang to the door, opened it, and looked out into the black stormy night. What seemed a shadow rushed toward her, she felt herself falling, but strong arms caught and bore her, half-fainting, to a lounge within the room.

Many have died from sorrow, but few from joy. With her husband's arms around her Mrs. Marlow's weakness soon passed. In response to his deep, earnest tones of soothing and entreaty, she speedily opened her eyes and gave him a smile so full of content and unutterable joy that all anxiety in her behalf began to pass from his mind.

"Yes," she said softly, "I can live now. It seems as if a new and stronger life were coming back with every breath."

The young fellows who had been the bearers of the gifts were so touched that they drew their rough sleeves across their eyes as they hastened away, closing the door on the happiest family in the city.

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III.

THREE THANKSGIVING KISSES.

It was the day before Thanksgiving. The brief, cloudy November afternoon was fast merging into early twilight. The trees, now gaunt and bare, creaked and groaned in the passing gale, and clashed their icy branches together with sounds sadly unlike the slumberous rustle of their foliage in June. And that same foliage is now flying before the wind, swept hither and thither, like exiles driven by disaster from the moorings of home ; at times finding a brief abiding-place, and then carried forward to parts unknown by circumstances beyond control. The street leading into the village is almost deserted, and the few who come and go hasten on with fluttering garments, head bent down, and a shivering sense

of discomfort. The fields are bare and brown, and the landscape on the uplands rising in the distance would be utterly sombre did not green fields of grain, as childlike faith in wintry age, relieve the gloomy outlook and prophecy of the sunshine and golden harvest of a new year and life.

But bleak November found no admittance in Mrs. Alford's cosy parlour. Though, as usual, it was kept as the room for state occasions, it was not a stately room. It was furnished with elegance and good taste; but, what was better, the genial home atmosphere from the rest of the house had invaded it, and one did not feel, on entering it from the free-and-easy sitting-room, as if passing from a sunny climate to the icebergs of the Pole. Therefore I am sure my reader will follow me gladly out of the biting, boisterous wind into the homelike apartment; and, as we stand in fancy before the glowing grate, we will make the acquaintance of the May-day creature who is its sole occupant.

Elsie Alford, just turning seventeen, appears *younger* than her years warranted. Some girls

carry the child far into their teens, and blend the mirthful innocence of infancy with the richer, fuller life of budding womanhood. This was true of Elsie. Hers was not the forced exotic bloom of fashionable life; but she was like one of the native blossoms of her New England home, having all the delicacy and at the same time hardiness of the wind-flower. She was also as shy and easily agitated; and yet, like the flower she resembled, well rooted among the rocks of principle and truth. She was the youngest and the pet of the household, and yet the "petting" was not of that kind that develops selfishness and wilfulness; but, rather, a genial sunlight of love falling upon her as a focus from the entire family. They always spoke of her as "Little Sis," or the "child." And a child it seemed she would ever be, with her kittenish ways, quick impulses, and swiftly alternating moods. As she developed into womanly proportions, her grave, business-like father began to have misgivings. After one of her wild sallies at the table, where she kept every one on the *qui vive* by her unrestrained chatter, Mr. Alford said :

"Elsie, will you ever learn to be a woman?"

Looking mischievously at him through her curls, she replied: "Yes; I might if I became as old as Mrs. Methuselah."

They finally concluded to leave Elsie's cure to care and trouble—two certain elements of earthly life; and yet her experience of either would be slight, indeed, could their love have shielded her.

But it would not be exactly care or trouble that would sober Elsie into a thoughtful woman, as our story will show.

Some of the November wind seemed in her curling hair upon this fateful day; but her fresh young April face was a pleasant contrast to the scene presented from the window, to which she kept flitting with increasing frequency. It certainly was not the dismal and darkening landscape that so intensely interested her. The light of a great and coming pleasure is in her face, and her manner is one of restless, eager expectancy. Little wonder. Her pet brother, the one next older than herself, a promising young theologian, is coming home to spend Thanksgiving. It was time he appeared.

The shriek of the locomotive had announced the arrival of the train, and her ardent little spirit could scarcely endure the moments intervening before she would almost concentrate herself into a rapturous kiss and embrace of welcome, for the favourite brother had been absent several long months.

Her mother called her away for a few moments, for the good old lady was busy, indeed, knowing well that merely full hearts would not answer for a New England Thanksgiving. But the moment Elsie was free she darted back to the window, just in time to catch a glimpse, as she supposed, of her brother's well-remembered dark gray overcoat, as he was ascending the front steps.

A tall, grave-looking young man, an utter stranger to the place and family, had his hand upon the door-bell; but before he could ring it the door flew open, and a lovely young creature precipitated herself on his neck, like a missile fired from heavenly battlements, and a kiss was pressed upon his lips that he afterward admitted to have felt even to the "toes of his boots."

But his startled manner caused her to lift her face from under his side-whiskers ; and, though the dusk was deepening, she could see that her arms were around an utter stranger. She recoiled from him with a bound, and trembling like a wind-flower, indeed, her large blue eyes dilated at the intruder with a dismay beyond words. How the awkward scene would have ended it were hard to tell, had not the hearty voice of one coming up the path called out :

“ Hi, there, you witch ! who is that you are kissing, and then standing off to see the effect ? ”

There was no mistake this time ; so, impelled by love, shame, and fear of “ that horrid man,” she fled, half sobbing, to his arms.

“ No, he isn’t a ‘ horrid man,’ either,” whispered her brother, laughing. “ He is a classmate of mine. Why, Stanhope, how are you ? I did not know that you and my sister were so well acquainted,” he added, half bantering and half curiously, for as yet he did not fully understand the scene.

The hall lamp, shining through the open door, had revealed the features of the young

man (whom we must now call Mr. Stanhope), so that his classmate had recognised him. His first impulse had been to slip away in the darkness, and so escape from his awkward predicament; but George's Alford's prompt address prevented this and brought him to bay. He was painfully embarrassed, but managed to stammer :

"I was taken for you, I think. I never had the pleasure—honour of meeting your sister."

"Oh, ho! I see now. My wild little sister kissed before she looked. Well, that was your good fortune. I could keep two Thanksgiving days on the strength of such a kiss as that," cried the light-hearted student, shaking the diffident, shrinking Mr. Stanhope warmly by the hand. "You will hardly need a formal introduction now. But, bless me, where is she? Has the November wind blown her away?"

"I think your sist—, the lady, passed around to the side entrance. I fear I have annoyed her sadly."

"Nonsense! A good joke. Something to

tease the little witch about. But come in. I'm forgetting the sacred rites."

And, before the bewildered Mr. Stanhope could help himself, he was half dragged into the lighted hall, and the door shut between him and escape.

In the meantime, Elsie, like a whirlwind, had burst into the kitchen, where Mrs. Alford was superintending some savoury dishes, exclaiming :

"Oh ! mother, George has come, and has a horrid man with him, who nearly devoured me."

And, with this rather feminine mode of stating the case, she darted into the dusky, fire-lighted parlour, from whence, unseen, she could reconnoitre the hall. Mr. Stanhope was just saying :

"Please let me go. I have stood between you and your welcome long enough. I shall only be a marplot ; and besides, as an utter stranger, I have no right to stay." To all of which Elsie devoutly whispered to herself, "Amen."

But Mrs. Alford now appeared, and, after a

warm, motherly greeting to her son, turned in genial courtesy toward his friend, as she supposed.

George was so happy that he wished every one else to be the same. The comical episode attending Mr. Stanhope's unexpected appearance just hit his frolicsome mood, and promised to be a source of endless merriment if he could only keep his classmate over the coming holiday. Moreover, he long had wished to become better acquainted with this young man, whose manner at the seminary had deeply interested him. So he said :

"Mother, this is Mr. Stanhope, a classmate of mine. I wish you would help me persuade him to stay."

"Why, certainly, I supposed you expected to stay with us, of course," said Mrs. Alford, heartily.

Mr. Stanhope looked ready to sink through the floor, and his naturally pale face and even his neck were crimson.

"I do assure you, madam," he urged, "it is all a mistake. I am not an invited guest. I was merely calling on a little matter of business,

when—" and there he stopped. George exploded into a hearty, uncontrollable laugh ; while Elsie, in the darkness, shook her little fist at the stranger, who hastened to add : " Please let me bid you good-evening. I have not the slightest claim on your hospitality."

" Where are you staying ? " asked Mrs. Alford, a little mystified. " We would like you to spend at least part of the time with us."

" I do not expect to be here very long. I have a room at the hotel."

" Now, look here, Stanhope," cried George, barring all egress by planting his back against the door, " do you take me, a half-fledged theologian, for a heathen ? Do you suppose that I could be such a churl as to let a class-mate stay at our dingy, forlorn little tavern and eat hash on Thanksgiving Day ? I could never look you in the face at recitation again. Have some consideration for my peace of mind, and I am sure you will find our home quite as endurable as anything Mr. Starks can provide."

" Oh ! as to that, from even the slight



glimpse that I have had, this seems more like a home than anything I have known for many years; but I cannot feel it right that I, an unexpected stranger—

“Come, come! No more of that. You know what is written about ‘entertaining strangers’; so that is your strongest claim. Moreover, that text works both ways sometimes, and the stranger angel finds himself among angels. My old mother here, if she does weigh well on toward two hundred, is more like one than anything I have yet seen. And Elsie, if not an angel, is, at least, part witch and part fairy. But you need not fear ghostly entertainment from mother’s larder. As you are a Christian, and not a Pagan, no more of this reluctance. Indeed, *nolens volens*, I shall not permit you to go out into this November storm to-night;” and Elsie, to her dismay, saw him led up to the “spare room” with a sort of hospitable violence.

With flaming cheeks and eyes half full of indignant tears, she now made onslaught on her mother, who had returned to the kitchen, where *she was making preparations for a supper that*

might almost answer for the dinner the next day.

"Mother, mother," she exclaimed, "how could you keep that disagreeable stranger! He will spoil our Thanksgiving."

"Why, child, what is the matter?" said Mrs. Alford, raising her eyes in surprise to her daughter's face, that looked like a red moon through the mist of savoury vapours rising from the ample cooking-stove. "I don't understand you. Why should not your brother's classmate add to the pleasure of our Thanksgiving?"

"Well, perhaps if we had expected him, if he had come in some other way, and we knew more about him—"

"Bless you, child, what a formalist you have become! You stand on a fine point of etiquette, as if it were the broad foundation of hospitality; while only last week you wanted a ragged tramp, who had every appearance of being a thief, to stay all night. Your brother thinks it a special providence that his friend should have turned up so unexpectedly."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Elsie. "If that is

what the doctrine of special providence means, I shall need a new confession of faith." Then a sudden thought occurred to her, and she vanished, while her mother smiled, saying :

"What a queer child she is, to be sure!"

A moment later Elsie gave a sharp knock at the spare-room door, and then in a second she was in the farther end of the dark hall. George put his head out.

"Come here," she whispered. "Are you sure it's you?" she added, holding him off at arm's length.

His response was such a tempest of kisses and embraces that in her nervous state she was quite panic-stricken.

"George," she gasped, "have mercy on me!"

"I only wished to show you how he felt, so you would have some sympathy for him."

"If you don't stop," said the almost desperate girl, "I will shut myself up and not appear till he is gone. I will any way, if you don't make me a solemn promise."

"Leave out the 'solemn.'"

"No, I won't. Upon your word and honour,

promise never to tell what has happened—my mistake, I mean."

"Oh! Elsie, it's too good to keep," laughed George.

"Now, George, if you tell," sobbed Elsie, "you'll spoil my holiday, your visit, and everything."

"If you feel that way, you foolish child, of course I won't tell. Indeed, I suppose I should not, for Stanhope seems half frightened out of his wits also."

"Serve him right; though I doubt whether he has many to lose," said Elsie, spitefully.

"Well, I will do my best to keep in," said George, soothingly, and stroking her curls. "But you will let it all out; you see. The idea of you keeping anything with your April face!"

Elsie acted upon the hint, and went to her room in order to remove all traces of agitation before the supper-bell should summon her to meet the dreaded stranger.

In the mean time, Mr. Alford and James, the second son, had come up from the village, where

they had a thriving business. They greeted George's friend so cordially that it went some way toward putting the diffident youth at his ease. But he dreaded meeting Elsie again quite as much as she did him.

"Who is this Mr. Stanhope?" his parents asked, as they drew George aside for a little private talk after his long absence.

"Well, he is a classmate with whom I have long wished to get better acquainted. But he is so shy and retiring that I have made little progress. He came from another seminary, and entered our class in this the middle year. No one seems to know much about him; and, indeed, he has shunned all intimacies and devotes himself wholly to his books. The recitation-room is the one place where he appears well; for there he speaks out, as if forgetting himself, or, rather, losing himself in some truth under contemplation. Sometimes he will ask a question that wakes up both class and professor; but at other times it seems difficult to pierce the shell of his reserve or diffidence. And yet, from little things I have seen, I know that he has a good, warm heart, and the working

of his mind in the recitation-room fascinates me. Further than this I know little about him; but have just learned, from his explanation as to his unexpected appearance at our door, that he is very poor, and purposed to spend his holiday vacation as agent for a new magazine that is offering liberal premiums. I think his poverty is one of the reasons why he has so shrunk from companionship with the other students. He thinks he ought to go out and continue his efforts to-night."

"This stormy night!" ejaculated kindly Mrs. Alford. "It would be barbarous."

"Certainly it would, mother. We must not let him. But you must all be considerate, for he seems excessively diffident and sensitive; and besides—but no matter."

"No fear but that we will soon make him at home. And it's a pleasure to entertain people who are not surfeited with attention. I don't understand Elsie, however, for she seems to have formed a violent prejudice against him. And from the nature of her announcement of his presence I gathered that he was a rather forward *young man*."

There was a twinkle in George's eye ; but he merely said :

"Elsie is full of moods and tenses ; but her kind little heart is always the same, and that will bring her around all right."

They were soon after marshalled to the supper-room, and Elsie slipped in among the others ; but was so stately and demure and with her curls brushed down so straight that you would scarcely have known her. Her father caught his pet around the waist, and was about to introduce her, when George hastened to say, with the solemnity of a funeral, that Elsie and Mr. Stanhope had met before.

Elsie repented the promise she had wrung from her brother, for any amount of badinage would be better than this depressing formality. She took her seat, not daring to look at the obnoxious guest ; and the family noticed with surprise that they had never seen the little maiden so quenched and abashed before. But George good-naturedly tried to make the conversation general, so as to give them time to recover themselves.

Elsie soon ventured to steal shy looks at Mr. Stanhope, and, with her usual quickness, discovered that he was more in terror of her than she of him, and she exulted in the fact.

"I'll punish him well, if I get a chance," she thought, with a certain phase of the feminine sense of justice. But the sadness of his face quite disarmed her when her mother, in well-meant kindness, asked :

"Where is your home located, Mr. Stanhope?"

"In the seminary," he answered, in rather a low tone.

"You don't mean to say that you have no better one than a forlorn cell in Dogma Hall?" exclaimed George earnestly.

Mr. Stanhope crimsoned, and then grew pale, but tried to say, lightly: "An orphan of my size and years is not a very moving object of sympathy; but one might well find it difficult not to break the Tenth Commandment while seeing how you are surrounded."

Elsie was vexed at her disposition to relent toward him; she so hardened her face, however, *that James rallied her.*

"Why, Puss, what is the matter ? Yours is the most unpromising Thanksgiving phiz I have seen to-day. Count your marcies."

But Elsie blushed so violently and Mr. Stanhope looked so distressed that James finished his supper in puzzled silence, thinking, however : "What has come over the little witch ? For a wonder, she seems to have met a man that she is afraid of ; but the joke is, he seems even more afraid of her."

In the social parlour some of the stiffness wore off ; but Elsie and Mr. Stanhope kept on opposite sides of the room and had very little to say to each other. Motherly Mrs. Alford drew the young man out sufficiently, however, to become deeply interested in him.

By the next morning time for thought had led him to feel that he must trespass on their hospitality no longer. Moreover, he plainly recognized that his presence was an oppression and restraint upon Elsie, and he was very sorry that he had stayed at all. But when he made known his purpose the family would not listen to it.

"I should feel dreadfully hurt if you left us

now," said Mrs. Alford, so decidedly that he was in a dilemma, and stole a timid look toward Elsie, who at once guessed his motive in going away. Her kind heart got the better of her, and her face relented in a sudden reassuring smile. Then she turned hastily away. Only George saw and understood the little side scene; but Mr. Stanhope was induced to remain. Then Elsie, in her quickly varying moods, was vexed at herself, and became more cold and distant than ever. "He will regard me as only a pert, forward miss; but I will teach him better," she thought, and she astonished the family more and more by a stateliness utterly unlike herself. Mr. Stanhope sincerely regretted that he had not broken away, in spite of the others; but, in order not to seem vacillating, resolved to stay till the following morning, even though he departed burdened with the thought that he had spoiled the day for one of the family. Things had now gone so far that leaving might only lead to explanations and more general annoyances, for George had intimated that the little mistake of the previous evening should remain a secret.

And yet he sincerely wished she would relent toward him, for she could not make her sweet little face repellent, and the kiss she gave him still seemed to tingle in his very soul, while her last smile was like a ray of warmest sunshine. But her face, never designed to be severe, was averted.

After having heard the affairs of the nation discussed in a sound, scriptural manner, they all sat down to a dinner such as had never blessed poor Mr. Stanhope's vision before. A married son and daughter returned after church, and half a dozen grandchildren enlivened the occasion. And there was need of them, for Elsie, usually in a state of wild effervescence upon such occasions, was now demure and comparatively silent. The children, with whom she was accustomed to romp like one of them, were perplexed indeed ; and only the intense excitement of a Thanksgiving dinner diverted their minds from Aunt Elsie, so sadly changed. She was conscious that all were noting her absent manner, and this embarrassed and vexed her more ; and yet she seemed under a miserable para-

lysis, that she could neither explain nor escape.

"If we had only laughed it off at first," she groaned to herself; "but now the whole thing grows more absurd and disagreeable every moment."

"Why, Elsie," said her father, banteringly, "you doubted the other day whether Mrs. Methusaleh's age would ever sober you; and yet I think that good old lady would have looked more genial on Thanksgiving Day. What is the matter?"

"I was thinking of the sermon," she said.

Amid the comic elevation of eyebrows, George said, slyly:

"Tell us the text."

Overwhelmed with confusion, she darted a reproachful glance toward him, and muttered:

"I did not say anything about the text.

"Well, tell us about the sermon then," laughed James.

"No," said Elsie, sharply. "I'll quote you a text. 'Eat, drink, and be merry,' and let me alone."

They saw that, for some reason, she could not bear teasing and that such badinage troubled Mr. Stanhope also. But George came gallantly to the rescue, and the dinner-party grew so merry that Elsie thawed perceptibly and Stanhope was beguiled into several witty speeches. At each one Elsie opened her eyes in a wider and growing appreciation. At last, when they rose from their coffee, she came to the surprising conclusion:

“Why, he is not stupid and bad-looking after all.”

George was bent on breaking the ice between them, and so proposed that the younger members of the family party should go up a swollen stream and see the fall. But Elsie flanked herself with a sister-in-law on one side and a niece on the other, and Stanhope was so diffident that nothing but downright encouragement would bring him to her side. So George was almost in despair. Elsie's eyes had been conveying favourable impressions to her reluctant mind throughout the walk, and she sincerely regretted that such an absurd barrier had grown up between them; but could not for the life of

her, especially before others, do anything to break the awkward spell.

At last they were on their return, and were all grouped together on a little bluff, watching the water pour foamingly through a narrow gorge.

"Oh! see," cried Elsie, suddenly pointing to the opposite bank, "what beautiful moss that is over there. It is just the kind I have been wanting. Oh, dear! there isn't a bridge within half a mile."

Stanhope glanced around a moment, and then said, gallantly: "I will get you the moss, Miss Alford." And they saw that in some inconceivable way he intended crossing where they stood. The gorge was much too wide for the most vigorous leap; so Elsie exclaimed, eagerly:

"Oh! please don't take any risk. What is a little moss?"

"I say, Stanhope," remonstrated George, seriously, "it would be no laughing matter if you should fall in there."

But Stanhope only smiled, threw off his overcoat, and buttoned his undercoat closely

around him. George groaned to himself, "This will be worse than the kissing scrape," and was about to lay a restraining grasp upon his friend. But he slipped away, and lightly overhanded up a tall, slender sapling on the edge of the bank, and the whole party gathered round in breathless expectation. Having reached its slender, swaying top, he threw himself out on the land side, and it at once bent to the ground with his weight, but without snapping, showing that it was tough and fibrous. Holding firmly to the top, he gave a strong spring, which, with the spring of the bent sapling, sent him well over the gorge on the firm ground beyond.

There was a round of applause from the little group he had just left, in which Elsie joined, heartily; and her eyes were glowing with admiration, for when was not power and daring captivating to a woman? Then, in sudden alarm and forgetfulness of her former coolness, she exclaimed:

"But how will you get back?"

"This is my bridge," he replied, smiling brightly across to her and holding on to the

slender young tree. "You perceive that I was brought up in the country."

And he tied the sapling down to a root with a handkerchief, and then proceeded to fill another with moss.

As George saw Elsie's face while she watched Stanhope gather the coveted trifle, he chuckled to himself:

"The ice is broken between them now."

But Stanhope had insecurely fastened the sapling down. The strain upon the knot was too severe, and suddenly the young tree flew up and stood erect but quivering, with his handkerchief fluttering in its top as a symbol of defeat. There was an exclamation of dismay, and Elsie again asked, with real anxiety in her tone:

"How will you get back now?"

Stanhope shrugged his shoulders.

"I confess I am defeated, for there is no like sapling on this side; but I have the moss, and can join you at the bridge below, if nothing better offers."

"George," said Elsie, indignantly, "don't

go away and leave Mr. Stanhope's handkerchief in that tree."

"Bless you, child," cried George, mischievously, and leading the way down the path, "I can't climb any more than a pumpkin. You will have to go back with him after it, or let it wave as a memento of his gallantry on your behalf."

"If I can only manage to throw them together without any embarrassing third parties present the ridiculous restraint they are under will soon vanish," he thought; and so he hastened his steps, and the rest trooped after him, while Stanhope made his way with difficulty on the opposite bank, where there was no path. His progress, therefore, was slow; and Elsie saw that if she did not linger he would be left behind. Common politeness forbade this, and so she soon found herself alone, carrying his overcoat on one bank, and he keeping pace with her on the other. She comforted herself at first with the thought that, with the brawling, deafening stream between them, there would be no chance for embarrassing conversation. But soon her sympathies

became aroused as she saw him toilsomely making his way over the rocks and through the tangled thickets; and, as she could not speak to him, she smiled her encouragement so often that she felt it would be impossible to go back to her old reserve.

Stanhope now came to a little opening in the brush. The cleared ground sloped evenly toward the stream, and its current was divided by a large rock. He hailed the opportunity here offered with delight, for he was very anxious to speak to her before they should join the others. So he startled Elsie by walking out into the clearing, away from the stream.

"Well! I declare; that's cool, to go and leave me alone without a word," she thought.

But she was almost terror-stricken to see him turn and dart toward the torrent like an arrow. With a long, flying leap, he landed on the rock in the midst of the stream; and then, without a second's hesitation, with the impetus already acquired, sprang for the solid ground where she stood, struck it, wavered, and would have fallen backward into the water had not she,

quick as thought, stepped forward and given him her hand.

"You have saved me from a ducking, if not worse," he said, giving the little rescuing hand a warm pressure.

"Oh!" exclaimed she, panting, "please don't do any more dreadful things. I shall be careful how I make any wishes in your hearing again."

"I am sorry to hear you say that," he replied. And then there was an awkward silence.

Elsie could think of nothing better than to refer to the handkerchief they had left behind.

"Will you wait for me till I run and get it?" he asked.

"I will go back with you, if you will permit me," she said timidly.

"Indeed, I could not ask so much of you as that."

"And yet you could about the same as risk your neck to gratify a whim of mine," she said, more gratefully than she intended.

"Please do not think," he replied, earnestly,

"that I have been practising cheap heroics. As I said, I was a country boy, and in my early home thought nothing of doing such things." But even the brief reference to that vanished home caused him to sigh deeply, and Elsie gave him a wistful look of sympathy.

For a few moments they walked on in silence. Then Mr. Stanhope turned, and, with some hesitation, said :

"Miss Alford, I did very wrong to stay after—after last evening. But my better judgment was borne down by invitations so cordial that I hardly knew how to resist them. At the same time I now realize that I should have done so. Indeed I would go away at once, would not such a course only make matters worse. And yet, after receiving so much kindness from your family, more than has blessed me for many long years—for since my dear mother died I have been quite alone in the world—I feel I cannot go away without some assurance or proof that you will forgive me for being such a marplot in your holiday."

Elsie's vexation with herself now knew no bounds, and she stopped in the path, deter-

mining that she would clear up matters, cost what it might.

"Mr. Stanhope," she said, "will you grant a request that will contain such assurance, or, rather, will show you that I am heartily ashamed of my foolish course? Will you not spend next Thanksgiving with us, and give me a chance to retrieve myself from first to last?"

His face brightened wonderfully, as he replied: "I will only be too glad to do so, if you truly wish it."

"I do wish it," she said, earnestly. "What must you think of me?" (His eyes then expressed much admiration; but hers were fixed on the ground and half filled with tears of vexation.) Then, with a pretty humility that was exquisite in its simplicity and artlessness she added:

"You have noticed at home that they call me 'child,' and, indeed, I am little more than one, and now see that I have behaved like a very silly and naughty one toward you. I have trampled on every principle of hospitality, kindness, and good breeding. I have no pa-

tience with myself, and I wish another chance to show that I can do better. I—"

"Oh! Miss Alford, please do not judge yourself so harshly and unjustly," interrupted Stanhope.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Elsie, "I'm so sorry for what happened last night. We all might have had such a good time."

"Well, then," said Stanhope, demurely, "I suppose I ought to be also."

"And do you mean to say that you are not?" she asked, turning suddenly upon him.

"Oh! well, certainly, for your sake," he said, with rising colour.

"But not for your own?" she asked, with almost the *naïveté* of a child.

He turned away with a perplexed laugh, and replied: "Really, Miss Alford, you are worse than the Catechism."

She looked at him with a half-amused, half-surprised expression, and the thought occurred to her for the first time that it might not have been so disagreeable to him, after all; and somehow this thought was quite a relief to her. But she said:

"I thought you would regard me as a hoyden of the worst species."

"Because you kissed your brother? I have never for a moment forgotten that it was only your misfortune that I was not he."

"I should have remembered that it was not your fault. But here is your handkerchief, flying like a flag of truce. So let bygones be bygones. My terms are that you come again another year, and give me a chance to entertain my brother's friend as a sister ought."

"I am only too glad to submit to them," he eagerly replied; and then added, so ardently as to deepen the roses already in her cheeks: "If such are your punishments, Miss Alford, how delicious must be your favours!"

By common consent the subject was dropped; and, with tongues released from awkward restraint, they chatted freely together, till in the early twilight they reached her home. The moment they entered George exultingly saw that the skies were serene.

But Elsie would never be the frolicksome child of the past again. As she surprised the family at dinner, so now at supper they could

scarcely believe that the elegant, graceful young lady was the witch of yesterday. She had resolved with all her soul to try to win some place in Mr. Stanhope's respect before he departed, and never did a little maiden succeed better.

In the evening they had music, and Mr. Stanhope pleased them all with his fine tenor, while Elsie delighted him by her clear bird-like voice. So the hours fled away.

"You think better of the 'horrid man,' little Siss," said George, as he kissed her good-night.

"I was the horrid one," said Elsie, penitently. "I can never forgive myself my absurd conduct. But he has promised to come again next Thanksgiving, and give me a chance to do better. So don't you fail to bring him."

George gave a long, low whistle, and then said: "Oh! ah! Seems to me you are coming on, for an innocent. Are we to get mixed up again in the twilight?"

"Nonsense!" said Elsie, with a peony face, and she slammed her door upon him.

The next morning, the young man took his leave, and Elsie's last words were

"Mr. Stanhope, remember your promise."

And he did remember more than that, for this brief visit had enshrined a sweet, girlish face within his heart of hearts, and he no longer felt lonely and orphaned. He and George became the closet friends, and messages from the New England home came to him with increasing frequency, which he returned with prodigal interest. It also transpired that he occasionally wrote for the papers, and Elsie insisted that these should be sent to her: while he of course wrote much better with the certainty that she would be his critic. Thus, though separated, they daily became better acquainted, and during the year George found it not very difficult to induce his friend to make several visits.

But it was with joy that seemed almost too rich for earthly experience that he found himself walking up the village street with George the ensuing Thanksgiving eve. Elsie was at the door, and he pretended to be disconsolate that his reception was not the same as on the previous year. Indeed she had to endure not

a little chaffing, for her mistake was a family joke now.

It was a peerless Thanksgiving eve and day—one of the sunlighted heights of human happiness.

After dinner they all again took a walk up the brawling stream, and Stanhope and Elsie became separated from the rest, though not so innocently as on the former occasion.

"See!" cried Elsie, pointing to the well-remembered sapling, which she had often visited. "There fluttered our flag of truce last year."

Stanhope seized her hand, and said, eagerly :

"And here I again break the truce, and renew the theme we dropped at this place. Oh! Elsie, I have felt that kiss in the depths of my heart every hour since; and in that it led to my knowing and loving you it has made every day from that time one of thanksgiving. If you could return my love as I have dared to hope, it would be a happiness beyond words. If I could venture to take one more kiss, as a token that it is returned, I could keep Thanksgiving for ever."

Her hand trembled in his, but was not with-

drawn. Her blushing face was turned away toward the brawling stream ; but she saw not its foam, she heard not its hoarse murmurs. A sweeter music was in her ears. She seemed under a delicious spell ; but soon became conscious that a pair of dark eyes were looking down eagerly, anxiously for her answer. Shyly raising hers, that now were like dewy violets, she said, with a little of her old witchery :

“ I suppose you will have to kiss me this Thanksgiving, to make things even.”

Stanhope needed no broader hint.

“ I owe you a heavy grudge,” said Mr. Alford, in the evening. “ A year ago you robbed me of my child, for little, kittenish Elsie became a thoughtful woman from the day you were here. And now you are going to take away the daughter of my old age.”

“ Yes, indeed, husband. Now you know how my father felt,” said Mrs. Alford, at the same time wiping something from the corner of her eye.

“ Bless me, are you here ? ” said the old gentleman, wheeling round to his wife. “ Mr. Stanhope, I have nothing more to say.”

"I declare," exulted George, "that 'horrid man will devour' Elsie yet."

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed big-voiced, big-hearted James. "The idea of our little witch of an Elsie being a minister's wife!"

* * * * *

It is again Thanksgiving eve. The trees are gaunt, the fields bare and brown, with dead leaves whirling across them; but a sweeter than June sunshine seems filling the cosey parlor where Elsie, a radiant bride, is receiving her husband's first kiss almost on the moment that she with her lips so unexpectedly kindled the sacred fire, three years before.

♦

THE END.

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